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CONSTRAINS AND STRATEGIES FOR WETLAND ECO-TOURISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JAMLAI WETLAND, KAMRUP(R), ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Wetland has great ecological, economic and social value. Wetlands are rich in bio-diversity and have immense potential for tourism promotion. Wetlands basically offer a range of recreational activities such as swimming, boating, diving, angling, sport fishing, photography, birdwatching and simply enjoying the landscape. Assam is endowed with large number of wetlands and they are appropriate for eco-tourism mainly because of their natural & cultural landscape and wildlife habitats. But due to natural and manmade causes these are degrading day by day so its proper management system is important. Jamlai wetland has also potential for ecotourism. Keeping this view in mind the present work on wetland eco-tourism of “Jamlai wetland” has been taken up with an aim to fill up the gap in our knowledge on wetland eco-tourism of Assam in general and Jamlai wetland in particular.

KEY WORDS: *Wetland, eco-tourism, Jamlai*

INTRODUCTION

Eco-tourism is a sustainable form of natural resource based tourism. It focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, its landscape, flora, fauna and their habitats as well as cultural artifacts from the locality (Dowling 1997, Fennell 1993). As one kind of eco-tourism, wetland eco-tourism which is based on wetland natural resources including wetland ecological culture offer a range of recreational activities such as swimming, boating, diving, sport fishing, bird watching, photography and simply enjoying the scenic beauty. According to the definition of International Convention on wetlands (Ramsar convention 1991), “wetland is natural or artificial, permanent or temporary wetlands, peat

lands, water areas, static or flowing, fresh, brackish, salt water, including the sea water whose water depth at low tide does not exceed 6m”

Till the early part of the sixties the value of the wetlands throughout the globe has not been realized (Abbasi, 1997). Wetlands are considered only as the land saturated with water and mosquito breeding centers. They were used as the dumping sites of rural and urban and industrial wastes; and many of the wetland areas have been filled up in subsequent periods for developing different infrastructures (Sharma and Goswami, 1995). Wetlands perform a dazzling array of ecological and many other functions that we have only recently begun to appreciate. Wetland ecologists have already documented the

following environmental benefit of wetlands such as it gives flood protection by holding the excess runoff after a storm and then releasing it slowly, enrich biodiversity, ground water recharge, diversity of fishes and wildlife habitats, provide opportunities for boating, swimming, sport fishing and natural beauty.

Assam is endowed with large number of wetlands which are rich in bio-diversity and have the immense potential for tourism promotion. Assam Remote Sensing Application Centre has identified 3513 wetlands of sizes above 2.25 hectares.

But many of the wetlands has been disappeared, shrunk and degrading day by day due to natural and mainly man made induced causes (Kaushik, 2012). This is due to filling of wetland areas for constructing infrastructure, dumping of wastes and liquid from industries, over fishing etc. So proper management of these wetlands are necessary at this point. Due to its different tourism aspects the Jamlai wetland has been taken up.

STUDY AREA

The Jamlai wetland is situated in the South Kamrup district of Assam, which is approximately 100 km away from Guwahati of Assam. It is situated approximately between 25°45' N to 26°25' N latitude and 91°10' E to 92° E longitudes. The climate of the area is hot and humid with dry cold season. The wetland covers an area of 559 hectares. There is a PWD road which divides the wetland into two parts.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the potentialities of eco-tourism in Jamlai wetland.
2. To investigate the constraints faced by the wetland.

METHODOLOGY

A thorough survey was made and interacted with the local people about problems faced by the wetland and sought different suggestions to mitigate the problems. Secondary data's were also consulted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jamlai wetland can be categorized under non-tidal wetlands. It has great bio-logical importance. The wetland has immense potential for tourism promotion. But wetland is facing degradation due to natural causes and manmade causes. Deosila River is the main inlet for the Jamlai wetland. The wetland plays a significant role in maintaining the water regime of the local areas and is also important as the rain water storage basin for the local people. The wetland has great diversity of fishes, other aquatic species and aquatic plants etc. The area of the wetland is so vast that it can offer great pleasure of boating, swimming, sport fishing, photography and enjoying scenic beauty. Every year boating

completion has been held and to see this people from the neighborhood areas gathered here.

But the wetland is facing many problems in the recent years due to the following reasons-

1. The population around the wetland is growing day by day which leads to the construction of new houses, other infrastructures. For this people started filling wetland areas.
2. In some part of the wetland people uses many pesticides, fertilizers in agriculture which are degrading the quality of the soil, water of the wetland which ultimately leads degrading many aquatic plants and animals.
3. The Jamlai wetland comes under a flood prone area. Floods have a positive impact on the wetland as they flush in many varieties of fishes into the wetland but they can not breed due to over fishing by the local people as well as community fishing.
4. The wetland faces pollution due to discharge of different pollutants.

Considering all these, tourism should be managed as a business if it is to be successful, it may be run by public, private, or any other organizations. Promotion of wetland location is most important to attract tourists. It can be promoted through including the information about the wetland in websites, local television, and radios. Tourism here can not only create provision of jobs, economic benefits but also a range of other opportunities if it is well planned and effectively managed. The potentiality of the wetland to attract tourists can be transformed into an incentive for its protection and restoration. Proper management of the wetland is very much important. Eco-friendly environment may help in developing income generation. Dumping of wastes into the wetland, restriction of uses of pesticides and fertilizers, over fishing has to be stopped. Communications, Education are important for managing wetland eco-tourism. Awareness should be made against anthropogenic disturbances in degradation of wetland.

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